NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER 1-0251 FEBRUARY 26, 1976
DAVID LENT/BEIRUT

SAHARA MANEUVERING

ANNCR:

THE MEETING OF A TRIBAL ASSEMBLY OF THE WESTERN SAHARA HAS BECOME A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE IN THE TURNOVER OF THE TERRITORY TO MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA. DAVID LENT SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM VOA'S MIDDLE EAST BUREAU:

VOICE:

MOROCCO CALLED TOGETHER THE TRIBAL ASSEMBLY, OR JEMAA, BECAUSE IT NEEDED THAT BODY'S ENDORSEMENT OF SATURDAY'S SCHEDULED TRANSFER OF THE WESTERN SAHARA TO MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN CONTROL. BUT THE ENDORSEMENT APPEARS UNLIKELY TO BE WIDELY RECOGNIZED AS LEGITIMATE.

UNDER TERMS OF AN AGREEMENT SIGNED IN MADRID LAST NOVEMBER, SPAIN AGREED TO HAND OVER THE SAHARA TO MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA AT THE END OF FEBRUARY, BUT THE AGREEMENT STIPULATES THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE TERRITORY SHOULD BE CONSULTED THROUGH THE JEMAA. SPAIN IS ALSO REPORTED TO HAVE STIPULATED THAT A UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER BE PRESENT AT THE SESSION OF THE JEMAA WHICH CONSIDERS APPROVAL OF THE TRANSFER OF THE TERRITORY. SPAIN IS ALSO REPORTED TO HAVE REQUIRED THAT TWO-THIRDS OF THE ASSEMBLY'S MEMBERS BE PRESENT.

DIFFICULTIES FOR MOROCCO AROSE WHEN UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL KURT WALDHEIM REFUSED ON WEDNESDAY TO SEND A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE TERRITORY'S CAPITAL, EL AIUN TO OBSERVE THE ASSEMBLY SESSION. ATTENDANCE BY A U.N. OBSERVER HAD BEEN CONSIDERED IMPORTANT BECAUSE THE U.N.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS CALLED SEVERAL TIMES FOR SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE SAHARAN PEOPLE.

OTHER DIFFICULTIES AROSE WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT THAT MANY MEMBERS OF THE 101-SEAT ASSEMBLY MIGHT NOT ATTEND. THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE SAHARAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT, POLISARIO FRONT, SAID IN ALGIERS THAT A MAJORITY OF THE ASSEMBLY MEMBERS ARE NOW FIGHTING WITH THE FRONT AGAINST MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN TROOPS. FOR THE SAHARAN PEOPLE, THE SPOKESMAN SAID, THERE IS NOW NO JEMAA.

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